

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

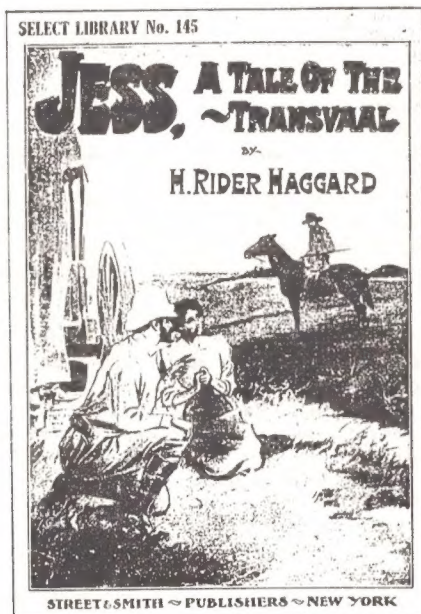
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PIONEER OF AVIATION SERIES BOOKS:
HARRY L. SAYLER AND THE AIRSHIP BOYS

By David K. Vaughan



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PIONEER OF AVIATION SERIES BOOKS: HARRY L. SAYLER AND THE AIRSHIP BOYS*

By David K. Vaughan

In the five year period from 1909 to 1913, the year before the war in Europe began, there appeared in America at least eleven separate juvenile series devoted exclusively to flying adventures; these eleven series produced a total of 50 titles, not including the Tom Swift books. Many other early series also included flying activities as part of their adventures (like the Motor Boys). Eight of the eleven series devoted exclusively to flying activities include Langworthy's Bird Boys (5 titles), Lawton's Boy Aviators (7 titles), Ellis' Flying Boys (2 titles), Van Dyne's Flying Girls (2 titles), Walton's Flying Machine Boys (6 titles), Burnham's Girl Aviators (4 titles), Rockwood's Dave Dashaway series (4 titles), and James Otis' Silver Fox Farm series (4 titles). The three remaining series were the product of one man—Harry L. Sayler, the pioneer of juvenile aviation series books.

These three series are The Aeroplane Boys (8 titles published from 1910 to 1913, written under the pseudonym of Ashton Lamar), the Boy Scouts of the Air series (14 titles from 1913 to 1922, only the first five of which were written by Sayler under the pseudonym of Gordon Stuart), and the Airship Boys series (8 titles from 1909 to 1915, the last volume of which was not written by Sayler). Sayler deserves recognition for developing these three aviation series and for writing twenty of fifty total aviation titles published from 1909 to 1913. Sayler was also the first to start a series; the first two volumes of the Airship Boys series appeared a year before any others.

The Airship Boys series is actually Sayler's only true series, for his other two aviation series (the Aeroplane Boys and the Boy Scouts of the Air) feature new characters in every book. None of them repeats a character or a location. Why Sayler should have decided on this approach is not clear; possibly he found it too difficult to develop the same characters over an extended sequence of episodes under the pressure of rapid productivity. In addition to his three aviation series, Sayler created the Big Game series (written under the name of Elliott Whitney; Sayler probably authored the first five titles; the remaining eight were written by G. N. Madison, Evan R. Chesterman, and H. Bedford-Jones).

But these statistics are not the primary reason to applaud the work of Sayler; he is important because of the quality and influence of his first and best series, the Airship Boys. The volumes in the Airship Boys series demonstrate a high quality of literary and intellectual content. These books reveal a number of impressive characteristics:

- substantial knowledge of natural science, including flora, fauna, geographical features, and meteorological conditions
- substantial knowledge of archeology and anthropology
- detailed knowledge of newspaper operations
- good understanding of business and finance
- true insight into the workings and principles of flying machines of all types
- a working imagination capable of integrating all of these kinds of knowledge into a readable, interesting, and reasonably dynamic style.

*Paper presented at ACA conference, March, 1990, at Toronto, Canada.

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How all of these characteristics came to be combined can be understood by briefly reviewing the essential facts of Sayler's life. As is often the case, these facts are not readily available. Nothing is given of the background of the author in any of his 20 volumes. Little beyond the years of his birth and death and a list of his pseudonyms can be found in the NATIONAL UNION CATALOG. There is, however, a reference to an article, "American Romance in the South," which was published initially in 1908 in the *Journal of American History*. Information listed under the author's name in that publication indicates that he was a graduate of DePauw University of Indiana. A phone call to the reference desk of the DePauw University resulted in the following information, obtained from a one-paragraph entry in the DePauw graduate register.

Harry Lincoln Sayler was born February 13, 1863, in Little York, Ohio, then a village approximately ten miles north of Dayton, the home of the Wright brothers. At the age of five Sayler moved to Shelbyville, Indiana, where he resided for the next twenty years (1868-88). He graduated from DePauw University (in Greencastle, Indiana) in 1885 with a Bachelor of Philosophy (Ph.B.) degree. In 1887 he was temporary editor of the Wabash, Indiana, *Times*. He moved to Chicago in 1888 (the home of the Reilly and Britton Publishing Company, which published his juvenile series books). He became one of the managers of the City Press Association of Chicago in 1890. The DePauw entry describes Sayler as "a Writer and a Newspaper Man," adding that he was "the author of many magazine articles, pamphlets, introductions, and several juvenile series books semi-scientific in nature." He was an honorary member of the Chicago Historical Society and an active member of the Illinois and Louisiana Historical Societies. He married Miss Nora H. Elliott, of Shelbyville, in November, 1899. He died May 31, 1913, at the age of 50.

There are eight titles in the Airship Boys series:

- 1—The Airship Boys; or, The Quest of the Aztec Treasure (1909)
- 2—The Airship Boys Adrift; or, Saved by an Aeroplane (1909)
- 3—The Airship Boys Due North; or, By Balloon to the Pole (1910)
- 4—The Airship Boys in the Barren Lands; or, The Secret of the White Eskimos (1910)
- 5—The Airship Boys in Finance; or, The Flight of the Flying Cow (1911)
- 6—The Airship Boys' Ocean Flyer; or, New York to London in Twelve Hours (1911)
- 7—The Airship Boys as Detectives; or, Secret Service in Cloudland (1913)
- 8—The Airship Boys in the Great War; or, The Rescue of Bob Russell (1915)

As can be seen by the titles and dates of publication, the plan of the series seems to have been to produce two books each year describing episodes relating to a common locale or adventure. The two principal airship boys are Ned Napier and Alan Hope, technically-minded young men from Chicago. Although Ned Napier is the man in charge with Alan Hope as his willing assistant, each boy has his opportunity to demonstrate individual initiative. There is even a mild romantic interest, as Alan Hope displays some interest in Ned Napier's sister Mary, who fears for his safety during some of their more hazardous flights. Their sponsors throughout the series are Major Baldwin Honeywell, formerly of the U. S. Army, and Mr. James W. Osborne, a Boston financier. In the first two volumes the boys are assisted by a black servant, Elmer Grissom, but he soon disappears from the series. Their constant companion throughout the series is Bob Russell, a young reporter for the Kansas City *Comet*, who is

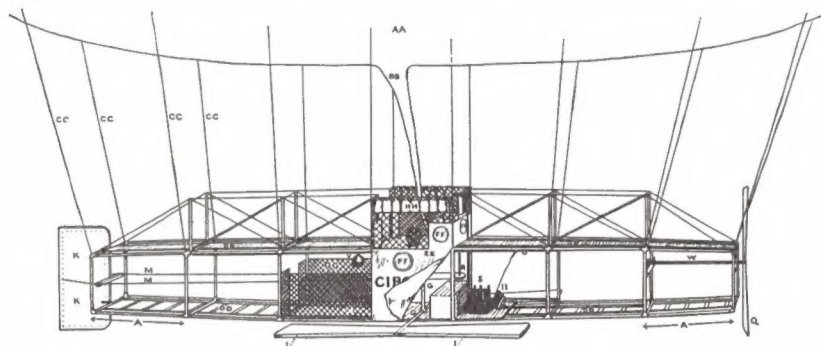


Diagram of Dirigible Airship "Cibola"

(These key letters refer to above Diagram only)

AA—Balloon bag of Dirigible
BB—Inflation tube
CC—Car support ropes

DD—Runways
EE—Cabin
FF—Lookouts

GG—Store-room
HH—Ballast bags
II—Light motor

brought into their confidence.

Aztec Treasure

The first two books in the series are among the best. Certainly the first book, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS*, is, with its blend of old west treasure hunt and technical accounts of the construction of an airship. Major Honeywell has come upon a map describing the location of Aztec treasure hidden near the conjunction of the boundaries of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. He asks the assistance of the Airship Boys, who can cross the rugged mountain ranges in the area with their airship. The major technical achievement of the Airship Boys, in addition to constructing and launching their airship, is their plan for renewing their hydrogen supply by taking along containers of liquid hydrogen. How these containers are maintained at the necessary very cold temperatures is not fully explained, but the concept is technically feasible, a characteristic of Sayler's Airship Boys books. At the conclusion of the first book the Airship Boys locate the hidden treasure in spite of Indian attacks but are forced to trek out to civilization after the hydrogen supply of their airship is depleted.

In the second book, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS ADRIFT*, the Airship Boys return to the site of the Aztec treasure, this time using a balloon to ascend to the elevated plain where the treasure is located. There they refit their original airship and load some of the more exotic Aztec treasure on board. However, a violent storm blows them far to the southwest. They eventually find themselves over the Gulf of California, off the coast of Mexico. Just as their airship is about to descend into the sea they find a deserted ship stuck on a reef. They are able to land on the ship and, using the materials of their airship, they construct their own airplane, and fly it safely to Mexico, then return to the United States. This is one of the more unlikely plots in the series, but Sayler makes it credible through his technical detail, especially when the Airship Boys transform the airship components into an airplane.

The Polar Reaches

The third volume in the series, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS DUE NORTH*, takes

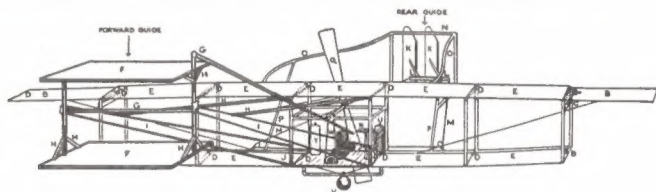


Diagram of Aeroplane made from Dirigible

(These key letters refer to both Diagrams)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>A—End sections of Dirigible cut off to make shorter frame for Aeroplane.</p> <p>B—Wings on ends of Aeroplane (tops of end sections of Dirigible covered with silk).</p> <p>C—Spring for wings made from valve rim cut in two.</p> <p>D—Small blocks fastened on top of cross-pieces of frame for wires to hold covering.</p> | <p>E—Silk covering over frame of Aeroplane (cut from balloon bag).</p> <p>F—Parallel planes forward of Aeroplane, to guide upward and downward movements. Made from bottoms of end sections of Dirigible and covered with silk.</p> <p>G—Lever and shaft for control of parallel planes. These are the lever and shaft of aeroplane guides of Dirigible.</p> | <p>H—Braces.</p> <p>I—Truss for parallel planes (arms of aeroplanes on Dirigible).</p> <p>J—Lashings holding truss to Aeroplane frame.</p> <p>K—Rear guides for direction of Aeroplane. Made from rudder of Dirigible, cut in two sections.</p> <p>L—Guide arm for control wires.</p> <p>M—Control wires for rear guides.</p> | <p>N—Frame for rear guides.</p> <p>O—Truss arms from Aeroplane to rear guides. Made from gunwales of small boat on derelict.</p> <p>P—Rear truss braces.</p> <p>Q—Propeller.</p> <p>R—Steering wheel.</p> <p>S—Engine.</p> <p>T—Gasoline tank.</p> <p>U—Cooling coils.</p> <p>V—Balance device.</p> <p>W—Propeller shaft and gear.</p> |
|---|---|---|--|

the Airship Boys to the northern polar area. Honeywell and Osborne ask the Airship Boys to accompany them on board the *Aleutian*, which sails north from San Francisco to explore the polar regions. The Airship Boys bring along an aero-sledge, an airship capable of landing on the ice, for assistance in the scientific research efforts. As they pass the northwest coast of Alaska the ship becomes caught in the ice, and the Airship Boys launch their airship to bring assistance. But the winds do not co-operate, and instead of moving southeast, they find themselves moving north. Eventually they pass nearly over the pole, then are forced to land on the ice by bad weather. They disconnect the gas bag and use their airship motors to drive the sledge portion across the ice, then convert the sledge into an airplane to fly across the ice-filled waters toward Herschel Island, which they eventually reach.

Once again a highly unlikely episode is made believable by the technical detail and accurate accounts of conditions in the polar regions. It is evident that Saylor researched his Airship Boys books well, for the stories contain a wealth of accurate information about aviation, anthropology, and geology.

The second volume in the polar exploration episode, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS IN THE BARREN LANDS* (1910), carries the Airship Boys to the area of the McKenzie River, which empties into the polar sea. The Airship Boys discover the remnants of a lost colony of white explorers, located in a rich copper mine in an extinct volcano. Their major aerial achievement in this volume is a long flight across the Barren Lands in the aircraft that they construct from the components of the aerial sledge used in the previous volume. By now the pattern of aerial innovation in the series is becoming established: Saylor finds occasion to introduce new and unusual flying machines—airships, airplanes, balloons, and aerial sledged—in each volume. This pattern continues in the subsequent volumes.

Aerial Entrepreneurs

The first title in the 1911 two-volume episode features the most preposterous title in the series: *THE AIRSHIP BOYS IN FINANCE; OR, THE FLIGHT OF THE FLYING COW*. And in fact there is a flying cow in the book, borne aloft over Niagara Falls by a controllable-thrust, primitive jet

engine created by the Airship Boys to demonstrate their ability to launch a transcontinental airmail service. This volume and the one that follows are by far the most amazing and advanced books in this series. Encouraged by Major Honeywell and Mr. Osborne, the Airship Boys undertake one of the most adventurous enterprises imaginable. They design and staff a transcontinental aerial mail route, complete with a new kind of airplane of metal monoplane construction, landing fields and maintenance buildings, and communications systems. In addition, they obtain an interview with and the financial backing of none other than Wall Street banker J. P. Morgan.

The technical details in this volume are truly impressive; Sayler in fact anticipates the actual routes and flying procedures of the air mail ships that eventually did become involved in carrying the air mail after World War I. Sayler even discerned that the eastern base for the operation would be Newark, New Jersey, with a route crossing Pennsylvania to Cleveland and then to Chicago. The narrative is filled with information pertaining to mileage, speeds, communications stations, and the need for accurate directional gyros and altimeters for aircraft—essential equipment for navigating aircraft across isolated areas at night, which is part of the Airship Boys' plans for their route.

The second volume in the entrepreneurial episode matches the first for originality and inventiveness; in this book, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS' OCEAN FLYER*, the Airship Boys construct a tri-winged aerial ship capable of flying across the Atlantic, New York to London, in twelve hours. Once again, Sayler demonstrates amazingly advanced thinking, as the Airship Boys fly a great circle route across the ocean following the shortest route possible, which takes them north across Massachusetts, over the Gulf of Maine and the east coast of the Canadian Maritimes, to Ireland and England, where they land on the outskirts of London.

Sayler provides detailed information about the new tri-winged airship, including propulsion systems, engines and propellers, cabin equipment, aircraft features, and control cabin layout. Once again, Sayler includes a number of technological innovations, all based on sound scientific principles. Equally amazing is the route the Airship Boys follow; it's almost exactly the same route followed by Charles Lindbergh in the *Spirit of St. Louis* sixteen years later.

Combat in the Air

After the phenomenal technical and conceptual achievement of the two entrepreneurial volumes, it seems as if Sayler had run out of ideas. The next title in the series, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS AS DETECTIVES*, was published in 1913, two years after the previous title. The plot of the book involves the Airship Boys in aerial surveillance on behalf of secret service agents, who are attempting to break up a scheme to sneak Chinese laborers into the United States at both the Canadian and Mexican borders. The Airship Boys ship two aircraft to Seattle—a Curtis Hydroaeroplane (designed to land on water) and a Deperussin (a fast monoplane of French design)—which they use to provide aerial patrols of the Puget Sound area, then fly down the west coast to Mexico. This story provides accurate descriptions of the terrain in the Pacific Northwest, including good geographical and meteorological detail, but it lacks the imaginative zing of the earlier books.

The second title in the air combat sequence, and the last in the series, *THE AIRSHIP BOYS IN THE GREAT WAR*, is not a good story in any way. But Sayler cannot be blamed for its bad qualities, for he had died two years before; the final volume was written by De Lysle F. Cass. In it the

Airship Boys launch their ocean flyer to fly to France to rescue their newspaper associate Bob Russell from the Germans, who have arrested him as a spy. The book is clearly intended to capitalize on the events of the war in Europe, as the Airship Boys fly from the European front to the Russian border in search of news. The technical details are almost entirely missing, as Cass utilizes the airship that had been created two volumes earlier, copying sections of Saylor's technical description practically word for word. Probably bored by his own uninteresting effort, Cass ensures that the volume is the last in the series as he crashes the ocean flyer into the Atlantic Ocean at the end of the book, destroyed beyond all possibility of repair and future use.

The Airship Boys series is Saylor's best, even considering the falling off in quality of the final two volumes. The series deserves special recognition because it is the first written about flying activities, with two titles published before any series titles by other authors appeared; it contains substantial information pertaining to natural history (archeology, anthropology, geology, meteorology); and it is wonderfully inventive and far-seeing (especially in the fifth and sixth volumes) regarding the possibilities and capabilities of flying machines. In addition, it establishes some characteristics that are emulated in aviation series books which follow, including the two-man team of protagonists, new aircraft in each volume designed especially for a specific purpose, informative and accurate technical detail, and the employment of the aircraft as a vehicle for exceptional adventure and achievement. Harry Lincoln Saylor deserves the highest acclaim for the imaginative dash and well-thought out details of the Airship Boys series, the series that inaugurated juvenile aviation series books and did so with technical accuracy and imaginative flair.

* * * * *

"FOOTBALL FIELDS AND SHIP DECKS"

By Jack Schorr

RALPH DELAHAYE PAINE

August 28, 1871 — April 29, 1925

Ralph Delahaye Paine, journalist and author, was born in Lemont, Illinois. His love of daring deeds on land and sea came from his father, Reverend Samuel Delahaye Paine, who fought and commanded a battery of light artillery in the Civil War. His admiration of New England's history and the sea came from his mother, Elizabeth Brown (Philbrook) Paine.

While still a boy in Jacksonville, Florida, where his father held a small parish, Paine saved enough from his salary as a \$12 a week reporter to enter Yale College in the fall of 1890.

He covered athletic news for a syndicate of over 20 newspapers and thereby paid for the whole of his own education and also contributed toward part of his sister's schooling.

Physically he was very strong and soon won himself a seat in the University crew and a place on the football squad. He had a grace and charm which brought him the highest social honors Yale could offer.

After graduation he joined the staff of the Philadelphia Press and went to England to cover the Yale-Oxford crew race and served as special correspondent for *Collier's Weekly* at track meets between Yale-Harvard and Oxford-Cambridge teams. But it was as war correspondent during the Cuban Revolution and the Spanish-American War that Paine enjoyed his love for the semi-quixotic adventure. William Randolph Hearst selected Paine

as the proper "fool adventurer" to take a gold sword to Gomez, the Cuban leader. He did some news gathering and filibustering under the adventurous Capt. "Dynamite Johnny O'Brien." In 1900 he was off to China to cover the Boxer Rebellion. From this experience he wrote *THE DRAGON AND THE CROSS*, and *ROADS OF ADVENTURE*. You can see he had the background for writing remarkable adventure and athletic stories, which he did so well.

He did some excellent research in the history of Salem, Mass., on Yankee shipping and published the results in *THE SHIPS AND SAILORS OF OLD SALEM*, 1909, *THE OLD MERCHANT MARINE*, 1919, and *THE FIGHT FOR A FREE SEA*, 1920. He wrote some fine boys stories enveloped in the atmosphere of his alma mater, *THE STROKE OAR*, 1908, *CAMPUS DAYS*, 1912, *COLLEGE YEARS*, 1909, *SONS OF ELI*, 1917, and *HEAD COACH*, 1910.

The roar and smell of the seven seas are imparted in *THE PRAYING SKIPPER AND OTHER STORIES*, 1906, *THE WRECKING MASTER*, 1911, *THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN O'SHEA*, 1913, *THE CALL OF THE OFF-SHORE WIND*, 1910.

In 1917, Paine was appointed as a special observer with the Allied Fleets, an experience which he loved and which proved unique and thrilling. See *ROADS TO ADVENTURE*. His stories were influenced by his friendships with such war correspondents as Stephen Crane, Ernest McCready, and Richard Harding Davis.

In 1903 Paine married Mrs. Katharine Lansing Morse, of Watertown, New York, and they moved to Durham, New Hampshire. Paine represented Durham in the state legislature.

The citizens of Dunkirk, France, awarded him a medal in gratitude for kindness to their citizens during the war.

He died April 29, 1925, in Concord, New Hampshire, and was buried near his literary workshop at "Shankhassick," his Durham residence. He was survived by his widow and five children, two of whom were step-children.

The above information came from the *DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY*, Vol. VII and the *U. S. CATALOGUE OF BOOKS IN PRINT*, Jan. 1, 1928.

Following is a list of his books:

- BLACKBEARD, BUCCANEER, illus. by Frank Schoonover, 1922, Penn.
- CADET OF THE BLACK STAR LINE, illus. by George Varian (Scribner's series for young people), 1910, Scribner.
- CALL OF THE OFFSHORE WIND, illus., 1918, Houghton.
- CAMPUS DAYS, illus. by Herbert Bohnert, 1912, Scribner.
- COLLEGE YEARS, illus. by Worth Brehm, 1910, Scribner, and (Every Boy's Library), Grosset.
- COMRADES OF THE ROLLING OCEAN, 1923, Houghton, and 1925, Grosset.
- CORSAIR IN THE WAR ZONE, 1920, Houghton.
- DRAGON AND THE CROSS, illus. by George Varian, 1912, Scribner.
- FIGHTING FLEETS: FIVE MONTHS OF ACTIVE SERVICE WITH THE AMERICAN DESTROYERS AND THEIR ALLIES IN THE WAR ZONE, illus., 1918, Houghton.
- FIRST DOWN, KENTUCKY!, illus., 1921, Houghton, and 1925, Grosset.
- FIRST YALE UNIT: A STORY OF NAVAL AVIATION, 1916-1919, 2 vols., illus., 1925, privately printed by Mrs. H. P. Davison, Locust Valley, L. I.
- FOUR BELLS: A TALE OF THE CARIBBEAN, 1924, Houghton.
- FUGITIVE FRESHMAN, illus. by E. Dalton Stevens, 1910, Scribner.
- GOLDEN TABLE, illus. by R. J. Cavallere, 1925, Penn.
- HEAD COACH, illus. by George Wright, 1910, Scribner.
- IN ZANZIBAR, 1925, Houghton (Hutchinson).
- JOSHUA BARNEY: A FORGOTTEN HERO OF BLUE WATER, 1924.

LONG ROAD HOME, illus. by Alonzo Kimball, 1916, Scribner.
 LOST SHIPS AND LONELY SEAS, illus., 1921, Century.
 MIDSHIPMAN WICKMAN, 1926, Houghton.
 PENFORD, (adventure), 1926, Houghton.
 PRIVATEERS OF '76, illus. by Frank E. Schoonover, 1923, Penn.
 ROADS OF ADVENTURE, illus., 1922, Houghton, popular edition, 1925.
 SANDY SAWYER, SOPHOMORE, illus. by C. Everett Johnson, 1911, Scribner.
 SHIPS ACROSS THE SEA, illus., 1920, Houghton.
 SHIPS AND SAILORS OF OLD SALEM, 1909, (with a new preface by the author and with a new and complete index), new edition, revised, illus., 1923, Lauriat.
 SONS OF ELI, illus., 1917, Scribner.
 STEAM-SHOVEL MAN, illus. by B. J. Rosenmeyer, (Scribner series for young people), 1913, Scribner.
 STROKE OAR, illus., Scribner, 1908.
 TWISTED SKEIN, illus. by H. Howland, 1915, Scribner.
 WRECKING MASTER, illus. by George Varian, 1911, Scribner.

In addition, he wrote the following on which I lack publisher's information:

THE ADVENTURE OF CAPTAIN O'SHEA, 1913.
 THE PRAYING SKIPPER AND OTHER STORIES.
 THE OLD MERCHANT MARINE, 1919.
 THE FIGHT FOR A FREE SEA, 1920.

There may be other titles I am not aware of. As an added note, I will say that Scribners did a nice job in publishing his boys stories, CAMPUS DAYS, HEAD COACH, FUGITIVE FRESHMAN, COLLEGE YEARS, SONS OF ELI, TWISTED SKEIN, SANDY SAWYER, SOPHOMORE. All are uniform in color, light tan, 8½ x 5½", with covers depicting a scene from the story with four to six illustrations. Likewise, with the Scribners Young Peoples Series, like CADET OF THE BLACK STAR LINE, etc. They were uniform in light blue bindings, illustrated covers with four to eight illustrations. They make an attractive addition to one's boys book collection and an important part of a representative collection.

* * * * *

INTERESTED IN SWAPPING ALGER BOOKS?

I have 61 Alger books, most in good condition, a few in excellent condition. I am not thinking of selling these books, but swapping them for other Algers that I don't have. Would you be interested in doing this? I could send a list of my Algers, and you'd know from my complete list the ones I don't have. I am interested in these books only for my recreational reading. If you think it odd for a 76 year old man to be interested in reading Alger books, I can only say that despite my age, my spirit is still young.

Let me know what you think of this. If it is feasible, I shall be pleased to hear from you.

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* * * * *

COLLECTING DIME NOVELS IN THE 1990S;

or,

CAPTURED BY OLD KING BRADY

By "A Novice Collector"

PROLOGUE

Collecting in this latter part of the 20th century borders on mania. Comic books routinely sell for the price of a small house, and an "inexpensive" comic can run \$50. People pay hundreds of dollars for old tin toys, and even toys of the '60s can reach the \$500 mark with ease. Big Little Books and Pulp magazines, while relatively stable compared to the previous collectibles, are still advancing steadily. Movie paper is going through the roof: CASABLANCA lobbies can bring \$3,000 apiece, FRANK-ENSTEIN lobbies more than five times that. Even old B Western and serial lobby cards hover around the \$40 mark if they're in top shape. Hardback science fiction and fantasy, ala Lovecraft, not only command top prices for original printings, but many are still being reprinted in collector's editions with production values far beyond what any of those early day authors would ever have dreamed of. Collectors of Disneyana, series books, original comic strip art and radio premiums command respect rather than laughter. Conventions attract crowds numbering in the thousands. Ten year olds study the comic market like brokers study the NYSE. Collecting what is loosely termed "nostalgia" is now a profitable hobby on a par with antiques and vintage automobiles.

And in the middle of all this, the dime and nickel libraries haven't increased in price since the late 1930s.

Dime Novel Round-Up presents more articles and ads dealing with series books and Horatio Alger than dime novels.

I have yet to meet a real collector of dime novels under the age of 30, and damn few under 40.

What's the problem?

CHAPTER I

WHO IS THIS GUY?

I am 37. I produce cartoons for Walt Disney Television Animation, the latest one being a 1930s adventure comedy called TALESPIR. I have

always collected something, starting with stamps as a boy, then graduating to comics, lobby cards, Big Little Books, pulp magazines, and now dime novels and story papers. This progression bears telling as it is germane to my topic, as unfocused as that may seem.

Like many future collectors, I began "collecting" comics, as opposed to buying and saving them, in the early 1960s. Prior to the appearance of the *Marvel Comics* line I basically bought eight or ten comics with my allowance every week without much thought given to complete runs. I bought what looked like the most fun at the time, and stuck them in my closet for later.

But by 1964 comic *collecting* was the rage, and I was swept along with the tide. At first I bought only what I wanted, but gradually I fell into the collecting traps: I had to have complete runs of every title I collected, and I had to collect what everyone else thought was "hot." Slowly but surely, I lost sight of collecting for personal pleasure and tried to collect for personal gain. The guys who had the most stuff, the *best* stuff, were the ones who approached the hobby like a business. Prices began to soar.

During this period I was exposed to my first Big Little Books (which I liked), pulps (which I didn't) and (now we get to it) dime novels. The first two items I gathered sporadically, my interest in them waxing and waning with that of the crowd, but dime novels—well, they were a joke. No one wanted them. And (horrors!) they were *CHEAP!* I don't remember the exact details, but somewhere along the way, in a large trade, I ended up with three ragged dime novels, and knowing that I couldn't palm them off on anyone else, I stuck them in a drawer.

I eventually sold all my pulps, and traded my Big Little Books. I got rid of large amounts of my comic books because, for a reason then unknown to me, collecting just wasn't *fun* anymore. I grew up, moved to California, and began to turn my attentions to making a living.

Amongst the stuff I moved out to the sunny state with me, although I didn't know it at the time, was a manila folder containing those three ragged dime novels. They stayed in that folder, untouched and unread, for almost 20 years.

CHAPTER II

LARRY LEARNS HIS LESSON

By the 1980s I no longer collected anything, although I still bought an occasional comic for the art. Since I had entered the animation field, unusual graphics had taken on an added dimension, but "collecting" was a thing of the past. That Holy Grail of comics, *ACTION* #1, was selling for \$14,000 (it had sold in 1964 for \$40!) and I had discovered while I might get \$5 worth of pleasure out of an old comic, that same book was a real burden at \$25. I just didn't like them that much.

One afternoon, bored with my usual pastimes, I dug out an old issue of a *Doc Savage* magazine—kept solely because of its fantastic cover art—and I sat down to read. It was interesting. I dug up a few more in a local bookstore, and was surprised to see how inexpensive they were compared to comics of similar vintage. One thing led to another, and I finally found a pulp dealer (there aren't many, you know) and through him I was introduced to the wonders of PULPCON.

That first year I bought about 200 pulps, making many mistakes regarding value, condition, etc., but the most wonderful and magical thing that happened is that I rediscovered collecting for the sheer fun of it. Pulps were definitely not hip, especially the non-super hero titles. They

were cheap, they had that great smell of old paper, and there was something mysterious in the fact that, for all intents and purposes, they represented a type of entertainment that had completely disappeared. The stories were interesting, and over the next several years I expanded my horizons from the "hero" pulps such as *Doc Savage* and *The Shadow* to the REALLY good stuff like *Argosy*, *Western Story*, *Adventure*, and *Blue Book*.

Additionally, there were a number of younger collectors who were entering the field at the same time I was, and our conversations weren't limited to how valuable, rare or mint a book was. We sought out the old authors and artists who were still alive and reveled in the tales of the older collectors who had actually bought these magazines off the stands. We traded, loaned, xeroxed our pulps, helped each other fill gaps in our collections. In short, we acted a lot like the dime novel collectors of a generation earlier.

In 1987, at the Pulpcon banquet, one of the people at my table was J. Randolph Cox, and (surprise!) the conversation turned to dime novels. I don't remember what was said, except that it was rambling and held my interest only until dessert arrived. I did think of the three dime novels I knew I had somewhere, but I probably would have forgotten all about them, if not for a chance remark and a six pack of beer later that same evening.

CHAPTER III

"DEAR MR. LeBLANC...."

Parties are a part of all conventions, and Pulpcon has several traditional gatherings. At one of these the topic of conversation turned to the future of pulp collecting. As the other members of this group had been collecting for decades, some having collections numbering 10,000 magazines and more, I sat back with a beer and kept my mouth shut, my ears opened. I was curious to know how much my collection might be expected to appreciate in the coming years.

But the general consensus seemed to be that there were not enough new collectors coming into the field, and new blood was essential if the hobby was to expand and grow. Most people under thirty collected comic books and if they even knew what a pulp was, they only dabbled in the most obscure and comic book related titles. Walker Martin, a good friend who has more pulps than should be legally allowed, was of the opinion that pulp collecting would eventually go the way of dime novel collecting.

What?

What happened to dime novel collecting? The thought that anything might have happened never occurred to me. I didn't even know that dime novels were ever collected. What did I say earlier about collecting for fun rather than profit? Well, it's true in an overall sense, but at that moment my only concern was how much I might lose on that early issue of the *Shadow* I had purchased earlier.

The facts, according to Walker, were these: In the 20s and 30s dime novel collecting was a big deal, with some issues bringing \$5, \$25, even \$60 a copy. Books were written on the subject, magazines did feature stories on collectors and collections, dime novel authors published their memoirs, and then...and then the authors began to pass on, as did the men and women who actually purchased the libraries and booklets off the stands. The collectors themselves began to age and, for who knows the reason, there were fewer collectors to pass the torch onto, fewer people to absorb the collections and nurture them like a valuable heritage. There wasn't exactly a crash in prices, but the prices stabilized, and in real terms

that amounts to losing value. Charles Bragin's 1938 "price guide" could almost be used verbatim as a guide today, but no one would mistake \$5 of 1990s money for the same amount in 1938.

The big collections, Walker continued, began going to libraries, which only further distanced potential collectors. Libraries generally allow access only to "scholars" and "researchers," which is great for history but discouraging to those who want to read and to obtain copies of their own.

And finally, Walker pointed out that dime novels, unlike pulps, were unreadable.

This was the turning point for me. Up to that moment my thoughts had been focused on the possible demise of pulp collecting, but.....unreadable? Isn't this the pot calling the kettle black? I had no idea what reading a dime novel was like, but I had read many pulp stories by this time. I loved them, but I didn't confuse them with "good reading." I enjoyed spending hours lost in *Argosy* and *Western Story*, but by the standards of "good reading" they were largely "unreadable." I couldn't equate PINTO BASIN BUSCADERO with LONESOME DOVE, or MONSTER OF THE LAGOON with KING SOLOMON'S MINES. Loving to read as much as I do, I simply had to read what was considered unreadable.

Somehow I got home with Ed LeBlanc's address, and after dropping him a letter asking for a sample copy of *Dime Novel Round-Up*, I dug out a dusty manila folder from a file cabinet. I extracted three ragged old magazines. I picked up the one on top—certainly as good a choice as any other—and began to read *Old Sleuth Weekly* #152 THE OGRESS OF DEATH SWAMP.

CHAPTER IV

QUO VADIS?

Secret Service #61 is entitled THE BRADYS AND THE FIRE BUG, OR FOUND IN THE FLAMES. The Old Ironsides story may have been my first, but the Old King Brady story will forever be the best dime novel I have ever read. It was the first dime novel I ordered from Ed, and the beginning of my collection.

It's May, 1990, as I write this, and it's quite pleasant to think back over the last few years: that sudden excitement as I discovered a whole new field of collecting; the gradual (*frustratingly* so) acquisition of knowledge; the discovery of Charles Bragin's 1938 booklet in a forgotten corner of a local library, stuck inside the Johannsen book on Beadle and Adams; the complete file of *Dime Novel Round-Up* at UCLA. Many a letter has now passed between myself and Ed, as have many checks (to him) and many novels (to me). I have read them, refined my tastes, learned to accept the novels for what they are. Perhaps they ARE unreadable by modern standards, but they are incredibly exciting and satisfying when read without expectations and judgments.

The illustrations, although often crude, are an endless source of enjoyment for me, and I hope one day to be able to put some names on those unique drawings.

And they're cheap! I've picked many up for \$1 or less from people who just could not get rid of them, and even paying top dollar for an issue rarely costs me more than \$5. But, you know, collecting is more than simply acquisition. I keep going back to that conversation with Walker Martin.

Pulpcon is a community. We're all friends who meet for three days each year (largely over the objections of our wives and employers) and do nothing but eat, breathe and talk about pulps.

Where is that community for dime novels?

It's alive in those early issues of *Dime Novel Round-Up*, and in the old Happy Hour Brotherhood, but today the passion seems to be for series books. I tried them, at one time had almost 200 of them, but I just didn't care for them. I leave the series books to other collectors.

Is dime novel collecting a dead end? In 1953 Johansen noted that a complete set of Beadles Dime Novels would be harder to accumulate than a set of Dickens' first editions, and this is just as true today. But someone who bought those Dickens firsts in the 50s would today reap a tidy profit, choosing among bids from libraries, universities and wealthy private collectors. That set of Beadles Dime Novels...well, if you had them, your best bet would be to donate them to a library and take the tax write-off. Libraries and Universities don't have funds to allocate to the acquisition of "ephemera" and good luck trying to find a collector, wealthy or otherwise, who would sink a lot of money into a commodity that has LOST value over the last 50 years.

This is both unfortunate and unfair. Those of us who are interested in the dime novel are faced with seeking out books that are rarer than any comic book or popular work, but which can hardly be given away once they are acquired!

Is this because the nickel and dime libraries ran for such long periods that people are intimidated by the sheer volume of a complete run? I don't think so. *Argosy* ran for over 1,300 issues, equal to any dime novel series, and the early Burroughs issues are harder to find than the Lost Dutchman Mine, but there are many collectors of *Argosy* as well as the other "long runs."

Is the quality of fiction in dime novels so awful by today's standards? Well, they are definitely an acquired taste, but so is pulp fiction. *Doc Savage* and *Conan* are great when you are twelve, but laughable at 30, unless you look beyond the prose to the atmosphere and the sense of time that the conventions of the dated prose conveys. Dime novels are wonderful time machines, and the best of them capture details of life in the 19th century better than any history book. The Old King Brady stories, both in *New York Detective Library* and in *Secret Service*, contain fascinating descriptions of a growing American city and the people who populated it, with adventure and melodrama added for spice. The earlier, more adult stories of the Beadles era brazenly but unintentionally paint a picture of America's conscience. Even Fred Fearnot stories tell us what people liked to THINK was true, even if we know that the picture of college life is a bit fabricated. And you know, sometimes, when an author slips out of the conventions of that era, there is a little poignant moment, an incident or thought that sticks with you as readily as moments from Dickens or Steinbeck or your favorite pulp author.

So, then, it must be *rarity* that keeps people from entering the field, right? But in just the last year, in addition to Ed LeBlanc's wonderfully fat list of dime novels for sale, I have been offered 400 issues of *Secret Service*, 500 *Tip Top Weeklies*, over 800 *Beadles Dime* and *Half-Dime Libraries*, not to mention various smaller lots. I am sure that seeking specific items, like the Buffalo Bill issues of the *Dime Library*, or a specific title in its first printing, can be frustrating and difficult—but how is this different from all other collecting fields? Some items are always the most difficult to find, and this seems to be an intrinsic part of the fun of collecting. A quick count of the total number of dime novels offered to me this last year comes to over 2,000 different issues. That may be a small part of the total, but it hardly is an example of rarity.

What, then, is the reason for the lack of interest in a most interesting subject? Are dime novels too archaic? Why does a single woodcut from *Harper's Weekly* command more money than an entire mint copy of your average dime novel? Are dime novels really just junk, ephemeral trash worthy of less attention than cigar labels or postcards of Coney Island?

My guess—and it is *only* a guess—not an answer—is that dime novels are simply forgotten. Their modern counterparts, which includes things as diverse as comic books, paperbacks and television, have all but disguised their roots. The lineage is unclear and the ancestor too distant to command much attention or respect. We all know that if articles began to appear in the local paper to the effect that a *Beadles Dime Library* sold for \$1,000 the subscriptions to *Dime Novel Round-Up* would double overnight. Dime novels would begin to be prominently displayed at dealer tables rather than being stuffed in a box under the table, available only if you have the presence of mind to ask for them.

Since this is an unlikely happening, the future of collecting dime novels looks bleak indeed. Those last few large collections will eventually go into libraries, which will have the effect of making the books even more scarce, while pushing them further out of the public eye and decreasing their value even more. While series books, pulps, paperbacks, comic books and other collectibles continue to increase both in value and in interest, dime novels may well recede further into the past, garnering only a few nodding references in articles on their more popular successors.

I should be happy. I routinely buy dime novels for \$2-\$3 apiece, and my collection continues to grow. My ads in various publications bring enough responses to warrant their continuance, as there are people out there who have dime novels they are dying to get rid of. But I sincerely hope that, even if prices never rise, there will be some sort of resurgence of interest in this rich, wonderful field. I hope that this article might be the first step towards that goal, even if it only prompts one person to start collecting those ragged, "unreadable" old books, just for fun.

* * * * *

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